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THE RATING OF THEMES BY THE COLLEGE ENTRANCE EXAMINATION BOARD

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This study is an effort to ascertain (a) the standards held by the College Entrance Examination Board for admission to college and (b) the degree of uniformity in marking by the readers employed. The head-reader and seven assistants, all of long experience and proved ability, kindly read and graded as at the June examinations nine themes. The first six readers in the tables following represent the colleges and the last two, private preparatory schools. It is a pleasure to acknowledge the heartiness with which they all contributed the time from the pressure of work to assist in this experiment.

The themes were mimeographed and submitted with no indication whatever as to the writers or the assignment set; consequently the task of the readers was more difficult than that of marking the compositions written for the college entrance examinations. Under normal conditions, the readers would have before them original manuscripts from which to judge neatness, legibility, and other mechanical details; they would know what tasks were assigned, the time allowed, and the length expected for the themes; and they would be assured that the requirements for all candidates were uniform. However, one of the most experienced readers volunteered, "There is not much doubt in my mind as to the approximate correspondence of the

task assigned with the nature of the task on the College Entrance Examination in composition." At any rate the results will aid teachers of English to know that pupils who write compositions as good as numbers 396 and 457 are sure of passing the examinations and that those who write no better than numbers 106 and 464 have no chances whatever.

The compositions, which were collected for the purpose of another study, were all written by seniors in nine widely-scattered high schools. They represent in the judgment of one or more teachers in these high schools "just barely passing impromptu writing at the end of the fourth year." The first five of the themes had been judged by from 17 to 34 readers as the poorest of 75 submitted, and the last four as the best.

Table I. shows the marks assigned by the eight readers for the C. E. E. B.

TABLE I

Judge, (College group)	Key numbers of the themes.									
	239	295	67	464	106	248	396	77	457	
A . .	50	45	50	60	40	55	75	55	60	
B . .	48	43	35	15	15	65	70	75	60	
C . .	53	45	50	45	52	78	87	85	68	
D . .	48	30	48	**	42	67	85	65	67	
E . .	45	50	50	55	40	65	75	*	60	
F . .	20	48	20	30	35	58	75	78	68	
(Preparatory school group)										
G . .	50	50	45	30	45	58	62	48	70	
H . .	40	48	50	36	40	70	80	58	72	
Medians	48	46½	49	40	40	65	75	65	67½	
Median Scale Values	54	55	55	57	60	74½	78	80	80	

* "77 is difficult to grade since judgment of the idea would depend on the way the assignment was prepared for and announced. The technique is passing."

** "In the case of theme 464 I should assign my mark with reference to the question of required length. If one takes into consideration the meagerness of the thing, as we should have to on the College Entrance Board, my grade would be 38; if this is not to be considered, I should say that the theme deserves five or ten points more."

It is obvious from this table that the best impromptu writing judged by the teachers as "just barely passing" at the end of the senior year of high school is in the opinion of these experienced readers clearly good enough to warrant a student's admission to college. Of the 31 grades only six are below 60, the higher standard for passing, and only one is below 50, the lower standard. It is more than probable that the rereading by another judge of themes marked deficient, which is the practice of the Board, would in every case have resulted in a passing grade. Reader G, representing a preparatory school added to his marks this note: "The grades of 48 and 58 (assigned on papers 77 and 248 respectively) indicate that they are somewhat debatable, and that if a second reader recommended raising the grades to 50 and 60 respectively, I should concur." It is also obvious that only one of the poorest themes would have any chance whatever. The conclusion is that fourth-year pupils who receive even a "just barely passing" mark from high schools holding the highest standards will almost assuredly be admitted to college, and that pupils who receive the same mark from the high schools holding the lowest standards have the barest of chances.

If we except four very low marks given by readers B and F — exclamation marks, as it were, determined by natural impatience, perhaps, rather than by calm judgment — we must conclude that the ability and experience of these eight readers result in a remarkable uniformity of grading. Excepting the four marks mentioned above, we find a maximum range, by these judges, of 37 percentage points, with an average of only twenty points for each theme, with an average P.E. (or median deviation from the average) of 4.4. Including all the marks, there is a maximum range of 45 per cent, with an average of 29.

One reader, from a preparatory school volunteered this criticism of the themes: "The chief fault of the papers, if you care for an expression of opinion on this point, was their lack of interest. The writers obviously cared nothing for their subjects, except in the case of 248, 296, and 457; the others exhibit a sad state of boredom, which is partly responsible — perhaps — for the weakness in thought, organization, sentence structure, and punctuation. For this reason, I should like to have awarded a passing grade of 60 to paper 248 on account of its human interest." Five of the readers did award this theme a grade above 60.

WILL O' THE MILL (239)

By ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

Will was an adopted son and lived up in the mountains with his father and mother. Will always watched the travelers who were going down every spring. Will longed to see the day when he could go with the people.

Will's father told him that the people were going down to the city below. The travelers often stopped with them and they told Will that the little boys in the city longed to live in the mountains. The travelers told Will something of astronomy and he was very interested but still he wished to see the city. The travelers told him that the city was not a pretty place. They told him of the filth which existed there.

After his parents died every one in the community thought Will would go below to the city but he did not. Will fell in love with a minister's daughter who lived about three miles from him. He told her how much he loved her and thought he would marry her, but he did not. He preferred not.

She lived with her father and he lived alone and paid his attention strictly to his business. They lived this way for a time but finally she was married to another man. Later she died and an not long he followed in the same path.

This is a rather odd story and I think that the author has almost lived the life of Will.

If the country boys could only realize what they have they would not long for the society of the city. Will seemed to take the strongest side of man after he was grown.

SOCIAL ACTIVITIES ARE A NECESSARY PART OF
HIGH SCHOOL LIFE. (295)

Resolved: That social activities are a necessary part of high school life, because social affairs are educational in their way, and they rest the mind, and take it off other things, and they afford pleasure to many who might not be able to obtain it outside of school. They also are a physical benefit.

Plays and tug rides are educational. The small plays that are given are a benefit, but such plays as Julius Caesar, Coriolanus and many other good plays that are given by high school students are an education themselves, for the spectators as well as for the participants. When on tug rides one sees many buildings, and places that they did not know, and they stop at, and explore where they have never been.

Many a student is studying in school most of the day, and then they go home eat something, and study until bedtime. If a play is to be given after school, or a dance, or a hike or some form of amusement it will take pupils minds from their work,

and when they do go back to it they will feel entirely different.

There are some students, who parents do not feel that they can afford to let their children go to places of amusement, where they have to pay, while they are trying to give them an education; so a great deal of pleasure is afforded some by the social events given by the school.

Hiking, rowing and dances are amusements that most people are fond of, and they serve as more than merely amusement, they help the physical development of the individual a great deal, which in turn helps them mentally.

By these points I think it is clear that social activities are a necessary part of high school life.

A NEW SCHOOL LIBRARY (67)

The old School Library situated at the Corner of Fifth and Chestnut streets was wrecked last Monday night.

The building, which is one of the oldest in the town, was built in 1830. It has been an eye sore, although an attempt has been made to remodel it, for the last few years. The building was formerly used as a church but was later abandoned for a better building.

The thunder storm Monday night, jarred the roof which has been for the last month unsafe, causing it to fall.

The damage is estimated at \$1,000 to the books and \$5.00 to the building. A new location will have to be found as school opens next week.

The question for the tax payers now is, which will be the better, a new building on the present site or another attempt to remodel the old building. Judging from the cry of the tax payers we won't have either. But here's hoping.

THE INFLUENCE OF MOVING PICTURE SHOWS. (464)

Moving pictures have a marked influence upon people. Some pictures have a good influence upon people, while others are very harmful. I think moving pictures help one's imaginative powers. After seeing a good picture, it is very easy to write an interesting story about it. They help people morally and intellectually. Pictures, having coarse, low morals, should not be approved of; as they often prove detrimental to young children and some older people who are not very high-minded. They are means of teaching good lessons, which would be different to teach otherwise.

MOMENTS OF ANTICIPATION (106)

Everyone at times has build air castles and has planed on what he should do under certain favorable circumstances. It is

not only probable, but is also reasonable that one should give his brain a vacation of a few moments once in a while to wander at will.

I have often had a great desire to travel all over the world, from the depths of the forests, to the top floor of the highest skyscraper in my country. Further than this I have made plans as to which direction I would start and in a general way, the course through-out the whole trip. This is not only a day dream, but if my desire is just as strong, when I am in a position to fulfill it, I will at least attempt such a voyage as this.

This idea of travel is only superfluous is far as plans pertaining the future are concerned. My ambition, is first, to complete both my high-school and college course of study and then attempt to mount the ladder of success through the medium of an active business career. One thing which I have tried to avoid, in considering the future is to not attempt any such position as bookkeeper in a business house. As early in my life as I can remember, I have always had a dislike for such a position as this. As far as making any definite plans, as to what particular branch of business I should enjoy the most, are concerned, I am too inexperienced to even attempt to answer. The exterior of many things promise better than they can really be and so it is with business. From the outside a concern might be very prosperous and successful but many of these are going bankrupt every day.

MR WINTON (248)

In the northern part of town almost on the outskirts there is a small store known as "Winton's Ice Cream Parlor. People waiting for the street car often drop in here, especially on rainy days. Here is the place an author, poet or anyone who likes to study human nature might situate himself to do so. The tables in the rear are always occupied in the evenings by a group of typical La Salle boys, who play cards and 'punch the candy board! But from all this crowd none are more interesting than Mr. Winton himself, who is always the center of the boys.

He is small, quick, and alert, with small, black, beady eyes which sparkle and dance yet seem sharp enough to pierce one. He is scarcely an inch over five feet and his short arms dangle freely at his sides as he takes his short quick steps. His small feet are never still even when sitting or standing; his childish restlessness is attributed to his nervous disposition. A normal chair is too high for him so he swings his legs to keep time with his talking; when standing he is never in one place longer than two minutes.

And Mr Winton can talk,—talk faster than any of the boys; and not only faster but more —yes, he can talk more than any woman in the neighborhood. His tongue is said to keep apace with his feet which are constantly "on the go." He picks up snatches of the war news here and there in the paper and as

readily gives his opinion of it (the war) as he does the neighborhood gossip.

It is the common saying that small men possess some of the traits belonging to women. Mr Winton possesses two noticeable ones,—his talking and his ability to cook. In his younger days he had been a baker but because of a disaster his cooking is now limited to meals and serving at lodges, picnic lunches, and the like. He has been 'baching it' for a number of years but neighbors tending his business say he is tiring of it and that he is not very happy because of being lonesome. But neighbors not tending his business tell of his engagement and say she is young and pretty,—so there must be some one who cares for the little 'dried up' bachelor. This question now is "Will he be happy then?" Ah!, who can say!!

HUNTING ARBUTUS (396)

I suppose almost everyone who hunts arbutus must find out about the same things in about the same way, but always the experience is most delightful. The sameness of the thing never impresses one. In fact, one always feels as tho he might be the only blest being in the world who is having those delightful sensations—except perhaps his comrades of the hunt. Never is it so beautiful as when he walks, or rather tramps, to the wood, for then indeed is the companionship of the bare, brown trunks, the rustle of dead leaves, and the comfortable seat upon the green moss most appreciated.

The first time that I ever gathered arbutus, we tramped three or four miles on a dusty road, barren of shade. None of us had realized before exactly how hot the sun was, or how heavy our sweaters. Just as I was beginning to despair of ever reaching the spot in which the arbutus grew, our leader said that we were almost there. "Almost" proved to be a quarter of a mile but that is a detail.

The woods proved rather a disappointment at first, all so bare and brown, with a carpet of rustling, crackling leaves. But there is nothing so heartening as—something to eat. Our little band scattered when this was over and soon, as I sat on a little mossy knoll, I found myself utterly alone. I could not even hear the rustlings and searchings among the leaves, which had here-tofore shown me my companion's whereabouts, tho they were screened from view. I felt myself the only living thing—for just a minute. But then—a friendly bee alit, (or tried to,) on the orange in my hand. A little colony of ants crawled from their hill among the moss. A bird called and whirled away among the trees. Indeed, my companions were the most delightful in the world.

Then I fell to searching diligently among the leaves for the little dark green sprays that bore, or would bear arbutus. Thus I learned that the flowers loved to hide deep in the leaves and mossy ground about the trunks of trees. My hair and hat were

both sadly awry before I found that arbutus loves the open and hides not under tangled underbrush.

And so I found happiness and quiet in that bare, brown and seemingly deserted wood—a happiness and peaceful quiet that one always longs for most at the end of a long and tiresome winter in the city.

ART IN COMMON THINGS (77)

Some people think that the works of great artists, great sculptors, great composers, and great poets are works of art and that there is no art whatever in the common things of life. This, however is not true. If we examine closely the common things of life we will find almost as much, if not more, beauty and art than in the great paintings. Let us first consider the source from which the artist gets his inspiration. Many of the most beautiful pictures which have been painted are scenes. The flowers, grass, and trees are often called common things, yet the artist's scene is a duplicate of these on canvas. There surely must be art in these common things of nature when a mere copy of them may bring an artist fame. Is there anything in the entire world more artistic than a well kept lawn, with the green grass, varieties of many colored flowers, and perhaps large trees with their branches swaying to and fro in the gentle spring breeze? But all artists do not paint nature pictures, some paint portraits. Did we ever see anything more artistic than a beautiful face. People are often considered among the common things; especially people of the lower classes yet artists have been made famous by the copy of a pretty face of perhaps a peasant or someone of the poorer class. An artist has also been known to paint a picture from a face that was not beautiful and to gain fame from this picture. I would not attempt to explain this, but perhaps there is art in the less beautiful faces also. So we may see by these instances that we do not need to look at a great picture, or heard a great poem or composition in order to hear or see a work of art, and that all we need to do is to look at the landscape or people around us or to listen to the sound of a brook as it flows over the stones, or the sound of the leaves of trees rustling in the wind. These are the works of a great artist and so we see there is really art in what are usually termed the common things of life.

THACKERAY'S STYLE THROUGH HENRY ESMOND (457)

Of all Thackeray's novels, *Henry Esmond* is the best, most interesting and an excellent example of his clear, concise style. First of all, throughout the book we notice the true ring of genuine humor, so characteristic of all his writings. Notwithstanding this never ceasing flow of spontaneous humor, his works were never without a sort of hidden melancholy. No matter how serious

a plight a character might be in, he always, in a very appropriate way, managed to introduce his brilliant wit. For instance, take the time that the band of soldiers came to search the house for papers, finding Lady Isabella in bed, fully dressed, wearing the gold clocked, red stockings and white red-heeled shoes, her face all daubed with paint. What could have appeared more ridiculous! What time could have been more distressing.

Aside from his humor, let us notice his moral teachings, which he so lavishly uses in *Henry Esmond*. This is shown in the following passages, "She was taught by that bitter teacher Misfortune," and "Sure, occasion is the father of most that is good in us."

Thackeray's realism is evident in every character and in every conversation. His characters are presented to us just as they are and not as stiff, bookish persons, while the conversations are expressed just as we hear them expressed and not in a mechanical way.

Other qualities of his style shown in *Henry Esmond* are; his almost feminine tenderness, shown in the character of Lady of Castlewood, Viscountess; his reverence for goodness as exhibited in the character of Henry Esmond; his calmness, exactness and simplicity which are prominent throughout the novel. His simplicity of style is one strong reason why his works are so widely read and appreciated. If we should read each and every one of Thackeray's novels, we could not find one to better illustrate his wonderful prose style.

These results having proved so interesting, the same readers were asked early in May to read seven additional themes, further to test their uniformity of standard and, in addition, to see if superior pupils in the lower years of the high school would be adjudged to write well enough to pass the entrance examinations. It is in the highest degree indicative of the professional spirit of the readers that six of them cordially undertook the additional task in the busiest time of the school year. In the judgment of one or more teachers in the high schools from which the second set of themes came, number 100 was considered "just barely passing" in the first year; numbers 25, 303, 282, and 35, "of highly superior merit" in the first year; number 191 "just barely passing" in the second year; and number 119 "of highly superior merit" in the second year. All seven are examples of impromptu, unrevised writing in class during the month of May, 1916, and in the judgment of from 15 to 34 other readers were considered the best examples of their class from some 75 widely separated schools.

Table II. shows the marks assigned by the readers of the C. E. E. Board. The letters A-H represent the same readers as in Table I.

		TABLES II							
		Key numbers of the themes.							
Judge	College group	25	303	282	191	35	100	119	
A	.	50	55	60	55	60	55	70	
B	.	50	55	73	58	60	68	58	
C	
D	.	53	65	65	54	66	70	72	
E	.	65	55	50	60	60	70	55	
F	
Preparatory school group									
G	.	60	50	64	63	68	65	68	
H	.	50	85	76	70	68	76	65	
Medians		51½	55	64½	59	63	69	66½	
Median scale values		70	75	78	78½	79	79	85	

From Table II. it can be seen that had the papers of these younger pupils been laid before the six readers they would all have had a chance of passing the examination for entrance to college. 28 of the 42 grades given are 60 or better, and none of the other 14 is below 50. Four of the seven papers would have had more than an even chance of being passed on the first reading with a grade of 60; and the others would have had one chance in three, or better. It is certain, then, that if these papers represent standards generally held by our high schools (and there is every reason to believe that they do) many pupils at the end of the second year, and some even at the end of the first, can satisfy the requirements of the C. E. E. Board for admission to college.

With this set of themes the readers exhibit no such marked deviations from the central tendencies of the groups as with the first set. The maximum range is 35 percentage points, with an average of 18 and a P. E. of 3.6. It may be objected that the readers, profiting by the report of the first set of ratings deliberately kept close to the passing marks 50 and 60 to avoid the earlier extreme ranges, but there is no reason to believe that they graded these papers less conscientiously and skilfully than they did the others.

All of the themes had previously been rated by from 15 to 34 readers trained in the use of standard scales. Only a few of these readers had taught English; consequently their judgments must be considered those of laymen who doubtless attribute more weight to the general impression of merit than to technical details. They represent, of course, the people for whom pupils are for the most part taught to write. Their training in the use of the Trabue Nassau County Scale,* an improvement on the original Hillegas Scale, gives considerable validity to the median values assigned by so large a number of such judges. The total number of judges for each composition is composed of from two to four smaller groups of judges, each group having marked the themes at different times. These small groups gave to the 16 themes used in this study a total of 42 readings, which make possible 36 comparisons of median marks for the same themes. The medians of the central tendencies of these deviations is 6.5, — that is, less than two-thirds the amount of difference that can be perceived by 75 per cent. of competent judges. Consequently we are forced to have considerable confidence in the marks representing the central tendencies of the larger groups of readers. These marks are at the ends of Table I, and Table II. opposite the entry "median scale values."

In comparing the marks attributed by the two sets of readers one must not confuse the different standards used. 60 does not indicate the same merit in both cases any more than 60 degrees does on Fahrenheit and Centigrade thermometers. To the readers who used the scale it means essential equivalence in merit with one or more compositions that have been selected by a clearly understood method as being definitely so much better and so much poorer than other standard compositions. Anyone may at will consult these objective standards and judge to what extent in his opinion the readers have decided correctly. To the readers of the C. E. E. Board, on the other hand, 60 indicates that a theme is just barely good enough to warrant the writer's admission to college. The subjectivity of this standard would make it extremely variable if it were not for the fact that the C. E. E. Board readers by long experience and repeated conferences have established among themselves a standard which is as constant as is indicated by the marks presented

(* Footnote: See *The Teachers College Record*, January, 1917)

in Tables I. and II. A new reader joining the group must learn by conferences what this standard is. It is unfortunate that a teacher preparing pupils for college can not share in these conferences or, at any rate, receive as definitely as possible the results of them, so that he too may know before the results of the examinations are published to what standard pupils must attain. It is hoped that the theme marks published in this study will to an extent reveal what the standards of the Board are.

But granting a different meaning to the same mark for the two sets of judges, one would expect, just as in the case of the thermometers, a relative agreement between the two series of marks for the themes graded for this experiment. A study of the two tables shows that this relative agreement is only roughly, very roughly, made. It is true, for instance, that both sets of judges rank theme 248 as decidedly better than theme 106; but although one ranks theme 77 as higher, the other ranks it as lower than theme 248. The disagreement may be due to any of several causes: (a) the number of judges in either or in both sets may have been too few to give sufficient validity to the central tendencies of their marks; (b) either or both sets of judges may have been incompetent to distinguish the degrees of merit within the range of the themes used; (c) the two sets of judges may have used standards (e.g., of substance and of form) so different as to make their conclusions incommensurate; and (d) merit in compositions, after all, may not be measurable. It is possible also that as the readers for the C. E. E. Board are primarily interested in deciding which themes are above and which below the standard for admission to college, they do not mark with the same accuracy the themes that are manifestly some distance on either side of the standard. It is well known that teachers generally in marking do not give the same value to the ten points from 15 to 25 that they do to the ten from 65 to 75. It is probable from the evidence that this is true: the C. E. E. Board readers seem to grade these papers much more accurately as regards the passing standards 50 and 60 than as regards any other point that may be chosen. There is considerable reason to believe that the group of readers trained to use the scale, even though for the most part not English teachers, are practically as consistent in their marking *throughout the entire range of the themes* as are the selected expert group of

professional teachers of English. If this be true, of course it is reasonable to suppose that the latter group would with a permanent objective scale become still more consistent in their marking.

Part of the evidence for believing in the help afforded, even to untechnical readers, by an objective scale will be published soon in another study; part of it is found in a comparison of the coefficient of reliability* of the two groups. That for the C. E. E. Board, derived from the 238 combinations of the 31 marks assigned to the first set of themes, is $+ .763$ (P.E. = .027). To use the entire data available for the second group of readers who used the scale would have entailed an intolerable amount of labor; consequently the complete data for themes 67 and 396 were used. From them appeared a reliability coefficient of $+ .864$ (P.E. + .012). But as the selection of themes involved a slight statistical fallacy, the coefficient was calculated again from the 405 combinations afforded by using the marks of one group of the judges for all of the themes. Then it was $+ .722$ (P. E. = .024).

Although this study does not warrant the statement that any one step on the objective scales for measuring English composition is the equivalent of the "just barely passing" standard of the Board readers, it is probable that no pupil who writes as well as values 75 and 70 on the scale will be debarred from colleges demanding for entrance marks of 60 and 50. A study of the themes used in this article with the marks assigned them should prove helpful to every English teacher preparing boys for the Board examinations.

EDITORIAL NOTE.

As our fall meeting this year came just at the end of the month, we are reserving for the January issue a review of our most interesting meeting. Suffice it to say here that our program was one of the most practical in the history of the Association.

(* Footnote: The curious will find this matter discussed in Brown's *Mental Measurement*, pp. 101-102.)

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